

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

February 2005
Volume 35, Number 2



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Grotto Calendar

Disclaimer Caving trips posted are led by volunteers. No grotto committee reviews any trip leaders' qualifications. New cavers should inquire about the nature of the trip and the experience of the leader in advance. Those participating in the trips should be aware of their limits. On vertical trips all participants are expected to supply their own gear and be knowledgeable about rigging and safe practices.

Feb 10: **SERA Planning Meeting.** Contact Joel McGuire for more information. (854-CAVE)

Feb 19: **Grotto Trip to Stephens Gap and Pipeside Pit** led by Sharon Faulkner. Camping on Scotsboro Mtn on Saturday night. Meet at the Liberty Restaurant in Scotsboro Saturday morning between 9:00 and 9:30 AM for breakfast. Trip leaves at 10:00 AM.

Feb 25-27: **Annual Guntersville Getaway and Grotto Auction.**

Mar 3: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.

Mar 4-6: **Florida Cave Cavort.** Information at <http://www.caves.com/fss/cavort.htm>

Mar 5: **NSS Spring Board of Governors Meeting** in San Antonio, TX. See the NSS Website for more information.

Mar 7: **Deadline for submissions for the SERA Guidebook.** See Dave Howell for more information.

Mar 17: **GROBS** starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Mar 19: **SERA Winter Business Meeting** in Stevenson, Alabama.

Apr 7: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.

Apr 21: **GROBS** starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

May 5: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.

May 13-15 **2005 SERA Summer Cave Carnival** hosted by the Birmingham Grotto.

The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto, Inc. of the National Speleological Society, Inc. Other NSS Internal Organizations may reprint material provided credit is given to this publication and the author.

Annual dues are \$15.00 per individual and \$20.00 per family which is payable on October 1st. Dues are prorated for anyone joining during the year. The subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be sent to:

*Birmingham Grotto
PO Box 55102
Birmingham, AL 35255*

Articles, Trip Reports, Graphics, Poetry, and any other speleo-related material should be sent to the Editor via email at the address noted below. Naturally, the Editor will accept typed text in practically any form or you can give written material to the Staff Typist noted to the left. Submission can also be done via e-mail to: scott@scottparvin.com. The deadline for publication is the 20th of the month; however, the Newsletter is limited to 12 pages and often fills up quickly.

July 4-8: NSS Convention - Huntsville, Alabama. Registration and information...contact Jim Hall jimehall2@cs.com (256-772-9829)

On the cover...

*Jeff Harrod
(John Roberts)*

Thanks to our wonderful webmaster Terry Ragon, we have a new domain that's all our own!!!

Birmingham On-Line!

Check out our web site: www.bhamgrotto.org

A Day on Keel Mountain

Jeff Harrod

After a great trip to the Walls of Jericho at the end of November, I noticed that the organization that bought the land, "The Nature Conservancy" (nature.org) also owns a 310 acre tract of land on Keel Mountain. The main attraction on the Keel Mountain Preserve is the Lost Sink Nature Trail. A trail from the bottom of the mountain leads to AL 641 Lost Cave, a short but very picturesque cave, with a large sink entrance and inflowing waterfall. I also noticed that AL 757 Esslinger Pit and AL 1186 Sandy Lynne Cave are both a few hundred feet away from the Lost Cave sink. It sounded like a fun trip so I along with John Roberts, Ryan Strickland, and Toby Kemp headed out on a bright and sunny Sunday afternoon to tour the caves.

After parking at the designated parking lot we all geared up and headed out on the 1.5 mile trail. We passed a few enticing holes on the way but kept our goal in focus. The trail starts out well trodden but towards the top seemed to pitter out as it gets steeper up the mountain. We got off trail for a little ways but eventually heard the Lost Cave waterfall crashing in the distance and quickly found it again. It had been raining all week so quite a lot of water was falling into the sink. The entrance was about 60 feet across and about 60 feet deep with one side as a walk-down. At the back of the sink is a 30 foot drop but with the amount of waterflow, we all opted out. According to the map the cave is only 100 feet long but I am curious as to where all that water goes. John started setting up for some pictures while Ryan and I headed to rig Esslinger Pit. We both bounced the 110 foot pit. It was a little tight in the middle but opened up toward the bottom. Ryan found the rope short so he had to come back up after being six feet from the bottom. We fixed the short rope and I headed down. Once back up, we all decided to quickly head to Sandy Lynn and rig it before dark. It was only a five minute hike and we just managed to rig two ropes down the 88 foot



A Self Portrait by John Roberts

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entrance pit right at sunset. Ryan and I rappelled down next to each other, and then went down the second 33 foot drop to wait for John and Toby to follow. They eventually met us and we all went down another drop of 27 feet. John took some pictures of the 70 foot flowstone mound and a few goofy pictures of us and we started out. I bumped the wall frogging out and a 2 foot section peeled away crashing to the bottom. Luckily no person or rope was affected. While waiting for their turn, Toby and John found a little snake at the bottom of the third drop. Toby carefully put him in John's camera case and they carried him out. While everyone was derigging, I took the case away from the entrance to let him go. Unfortunately he tried to escape while the lid was being shut. It wasn't a pretty site. I played with the idea of lying about the fate of the snake. They did name it and all. I decided to break the bad news. Toby did exclaim that that's about the most inefficient way

to kill a snake he could imagine. Anyway, long since dark at 8:30pm we all found our way back to the truck

and made it to Dairy Queen 10 minutes before closing much to the chagrin of the employees. Great day!



*Fun at the bottom of the pit.
(John Roberts)*

December Camping

Sharon Faulkner

The Ladies Grotto campout on December 11, 2004, was a night of relaxed camping in front of a warm fire on Scottsboro Mountain. Casey and I showed up just before dark and after waiting a while for others, we decided no one else was coming. Just as we were considering going back home, Leigh Dudrow arrived. As we were gathering wood for a fire Dirk Siron drove up on his way back from Tennessee. The weather was just above very cold, but we kept the fire going through a few sprinkles of rain, possibly mixed with a few snowflakes. We had the usual chatter and campfire talk, and found out how Dirk became a rocket scientist. Always interesting the things you learn sitting around a campfire in the woods. With many busy with Christmas preparations and the Cumberland Caverns held on the same night, the campout was not attended by many. However, I always enjoy being outdoors and sitting around the campfire with good company. It was also a nice break from the hustle and bustle and rushing around that accompanies the holiday season.



*Enjoying the Campfire.
(Sharon Faulkner)*

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Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes

January 6, 2005

Steve Sills opened the meeting and a Motion passed to make one correction to the January Minutes. The correction is that the Guntersville Getaway date is February 25 - February 27, 2005.

VISITORS:
None.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Gary Barnes reported \$2,359.22 in the checking account and \$3,969.87 in conservation CD's. The total to date is \$6,329.09. The profit from the BOG weekend after expenses was \$162.00, which was donated to the NSS Great X Acquisition Fund.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Sharon Faulkner suggested the July 2005 meeting be changed. A Motion passed to move the meeting to June 30th because of the NSS convention.

Sharon asked if anyone is interested in leading youth groups on trips. Jeannie Cates will complete the Youth Groups Liaison Committee Grotto Questionnaire and Joel McGuire is the contact for the youth liaison trips.

Sharon announced that January 29th is another tentatively scheduled grotto campout on Scottsboro mountain. Anyone is welcome.

Thursday, January 20th will be the next SERA meeting held at Scott and Julie Fee's house at 7:00 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS:

The annual Sinking Cove camp out may need to be moved to August because of the NSS convention. Steve Sills volunteered to contact Buddy Lane to see if August is open. There will be more discussion at the next meeting.

Leigh Dudrow discussed that the TAG Fall Cave-In is the day after our October 2005 meeting so a Motion passed to move the date of the meeting to September 29th. She will check to see that the library is available on this date.

Joel McGuire brought up the discussion of Dave Howell needing articles and pictures for the SERA 2005 guidebook. Dave needs pictures of any

caves, including the ones discussed in the guidebook or information on caves in general. He is open to suggestions. Hazard Bryant will coordinate the led trips at SERA. Dave needs to get this information as soon as possible. He would like to include cave maps and descriptions not in a previous guidebook.

Steve Sills has spoken with Myrna Attaway about the SERA Winter Business meeting being held at a local church in Stevenson. Leigh Dudrow will check with Myrna about the details.

Larry Money will handle getting the end pieces for the tarp.

Steve Sills has a working copy of the Guffey movie. He gave it to Larry Money to narrate.

NEW BUSINESS:

Dave Howell stated the rental and schedule for the library should be arranged. Gary Barnes will handle this matter.

TRIP REPORTS:

Dave Caudle went to some lava tubes in Hawaii.

Shay Howell did her 2nd pit at Hole in the Road Cave, a 58-foot drop. She

also went to Lost Creek Cave and Mystery Bone cave, which are in Guntersville. Twelve others went along: Robert West, Lin Guy, Dave Howell, some of the Montgomery grotto and the Brewer family from Chattanooga who are Lin's friends.

Scott Fee, Julie Fee and Judy Ranelli went to do some short pits to try out Judy's frog system. They went to Quarry Cave near Guntersville, which was gated and then they went to Shelton Cave.

Judy Ranelli, Scott Parvin and Scott Fee went to Horse, Adcock and Blowing Saltpeter caves.

Jeff Harrod, Ryan Strickland, Toby Kemp and John Roberts went to Lost Cave, Esslinger Pit and Sandy Lin.

David McRae and Tim Hudson bounced a 150-foot bridge in Trafford.

PROGRAM:

Larry Money presented slides from Wookey Hole in England.

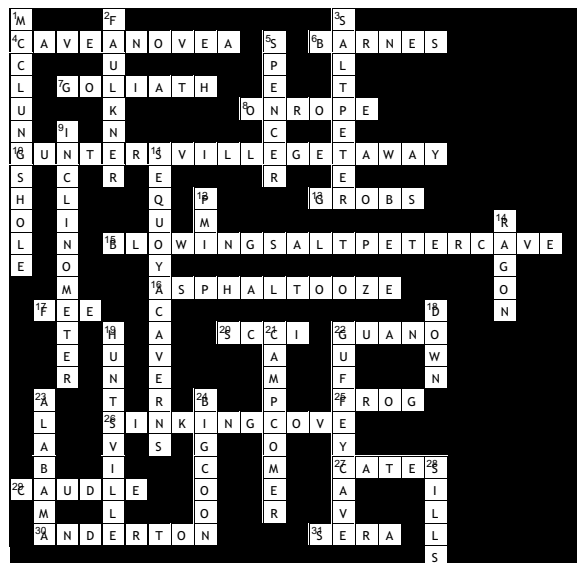
Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeannie Cates, Secretary

Birmingham Grotto Crossword January 2005

Scott A. Parvin



Answers to last month's crossword puzzle

Ridgewalking News

Dave Howell

If you haven't looked at this year's map of the James D. Martin-Skyline Wildlife Management Area, you're in for a pleasant surprise. The WMA boundaries normally change a bit year to year, picking up a quarter section here, losing one there, but this year the boundary changes are dramatic. The incorporation of the Walls of Jericho as a state-owned natural area open to the public via hiking trails from the top of the plateau has greatly increased the Skyline WMA area to the northwest, opening a number of potential ridgewalking and caving areas to cavers for the first time in at least 10 or 15 years. Accordingly, even though circumstances and events have conspired against my getting out to ridgewalk or cave as much this fall and winter as I would have liked, we have begun initial forays into this new area to see what we can find of speleological interest.

On December 12 Tom Hagood and I head for this newly added/opened area of the Skyline to have an initial look around. Parking at the Walls of Jericho trail head on State Road 79 just south of the Tennessee state line, we head down the hill looking for the sandstone-limestone joint. We find it, along with the sound of a waterfall not far below; following the sound, we find a lovely 50 foot waterfall down a limestone cliff with 4 holes in the wall toward the bottom, three of which are gushing water! Although gorgeous, this feature turns out to be an IKF* at best, with the dry hole only about 35 feet long, two of the flowing holes too small and the third *maybe* large enough to enter but 10 feet up the wall. The waterfall itself, Tom finds upon climbing up to investigate its source, comes from a high elevation, definitely-no-entrance spring. (*IKF = Interesting Karst Feature)

Walking on, we descend to a point below where two streams join; here we are about 700 feet below the parking place elevation. Desiring to walk the top of the limestone, however, after a short break we ascend to that elevation, around 1100 feet. Heading south, we do not go far before coming upon a beautiful entrance in a small sink in a dry streambed, not even close to any of

the known-to-the-ACS caves shown on my topo map. Excited, I climb down into the inviting-looking hole in the bottom of the sink with visions of pits and passage dancing in my head, but alas! It goes only to a single small, low room with a debris plug in an impossibly narrow crack at one end. Our walk continues.

Using this dud as our turnaround, we head north at the same elevation, back toward the landmark at which we will climb out to the trail head parking place. I follow the elevation of the dud, and Tom walks slightly higher; I quickly find myself following a trail of karst features. I run from one of these to another like a kid in a toy store, but find no entrances, in fact precious few openings of any size. As we approach the climb-out point, however, I find a small sink that *does* have an opening in it, a 6 inches wide by 12 inches high slot at the bottom of a short 45 degree slope. Too narrow to even get my head far enough into to look through the slot, I drop rocks; they roll down the slope, go through the slot, then there are two seconds of silence before I hear them crash on the bottom. This suggests a 60-90' pit, a decent find if we can make the entrance slot enterable! The sun, however, has sunk well below the western hilltop; full dark will be upon us in another hour or less. Further investigation or excavation will have to wait for another day.

Our return to the area is on January 1, a good way to start the New Year! Reed Hilton joins Tom and me to return to the 2-second drop I observed the previous trip, and to ridgewalk if the pit doesn't pan out. Carrying digging tools, we retrace our steps back to the lead. The feature is obscure, so I'm glad for the help of my GPS. When it is found, Tom and

Reed are both impressed with the rock drops, so we commence excavation.

Removing a ton of soil from the slot and several rocks, the largest of which we haul from the hole with a webbing strap, we manage to open up somewhat both the slot and the slope down to it, but not enough to enter or even look straight down in. Working on this, we begin to hear distant hoots and return them. It is Lin Guy and Steve Brewer, whom I had told of our trip but had to commit only to "meet y'all in the woods" (with some precise directions on where to look for us). Pitching in to help with the dig, Lin and Steve succeed in removing a large, flat rock poised above the slot, both threatening and confining, and after a bad moment when we think we're going to drop the thing and block the pit, we manage to heave it out. The slot is very nearly enterable now, the only obstacle a cantaloupe-size protrusion from the left wall, unfortunately part of the solution rock, not loose like the ones we've so far removed, and no room to get a good swing at it with the hammer. We have gotten the slot opened sufficiently to look down the drop, however, and judge it to be 70' deep. We cannot see much of the area at the bottom. Judging the protrusion will need to be shot, we knock off for the day. With an estimated two hours to full dark, we start back to the parking place.

That's the story to date. A return is planned, with a good Grotto friend who is also an experienced shooter. We are excited about the prospects of a new pit, perhaps even with passage, or a multidrop - the imagination runs wild - and are also excited about the ridgewalking possibilities of this newly opened area. Watch this space for updates.

Reminder!!!

The Deadline for submissions for the SERA Guidebook is March 7th! Please get all submissions to Dave Howell as soon as possible.

BOG Meeting: Fall 2004

Sharon Faulkner

The weekend of November 6, 2004, the Birmingham Grotto hosted the 2004 Fall Board of Governor's Meeting in Pelham, Alabama. A thank you goes out to Gary Barnes for opening his home, not only for the Friday night Howdy Party to welcome arriving NSS Officers and Directors, but also for providing accommodations for out of town guests. It was nice to meet members of the Board and have a chance to talk with them in a relaxed setting. We had plenty of refreshments available and I would be remiss if I didn't mention Gary's smoked salmon, which was a favorite of many.

With the day long meeting scheduled the next day the majority of folks left the Howdy Party reasonably early. Peri Franz and Steve Omeroid soon bid the rest of us goodnight. That left Gary, Myrna Attaway, Jeannie Cates, Bill Liebman, Philip Moss, and myself to uphold the long held reputation for late night talk and laughter. We must have been successful, even with our chaos confined to the kitchen area and the doors closed we eventually lured Peri back to the late night gabfest. I first met Peri at the 2001 NSS Convention and she and I took this opportunity to exchange thoughts on various topics, including the upcoming 2005 Convention. Peri was Chair for the 2003 Convention in California. The laughter coming from Gary, Myrna, Jeannie, Bill, and Philip while trading jokes, interspersed with other tidbits of interesting conversation drew us in that direction, and continued on until the last bite of salmon was finished, sometime after one in the morning. I'm not sure about anyone else, but it took me more than a few cups of coffee before reaching full bright-eyed and bushy-tailed mode on Saturday morning.

The BOG meeting proceeded on schedule with a small, but attentive audience. Donna Cobb had prepared a sandwich buffet and invited attendees to have lunch at her home during the closed session of the meeting. Jim Hall, Jim Wilbanks, and myself enjoyed the lunch and reading Donna's just delivered November issue of the *NSS News*. Thank you

Donna for the hospitality.

Our Saturday evening Halloween party included a Bar-be-que on site at Alabama Caverns and a bonfire. Approximately 50 people attended the evening festivities, some in costume, some not. The delicious entrées were prepared by culinary genius Jason Wall, with side dishes provided by various grotto members. Following dinner the gated cave was opened for touring and Mike McEachern presented caving slides for additional entertainment. Everyone gradually gravitated to the bonfire for warmth and visitation and as our guests left, or retired for the night, our group became a smaller

circle of familiar faces. Eventually only April, Hazard, Howdy, Jason, Jeannie, Scott, Steve, and myself remained around the fire with most camping on the premises overnight.

According to all comments I've heard from grotto members, the consensus is that everyone enjoyed the weekend and the hosting duties. Maybe we can consider hosting another BOG meeting again in a few years. On a final note, the proceeds from the Fall BOG Meeting after expenses were \$162.00. This has been donated to the NSS Great X Acquisition Fund. Good job Birmingham Grotto.



*Enjoying the festivities of the BOG Meeting!
(Sharon Faulkner)*

The Incredible Shrinking Newsletter!!!

Yes, this Newsletter is four pages shorter than usual. Please submit those articles, pictures, and trip reports so we can fill up those pages next month. Send all submissions to the

Editor at:

scott@scottparvin.com

News and Notes

Dave Howell

*** Ah, February, the month of love! Named for *Juno Februata*, the aspect of the Roman Great Mother which was the Goddess of Erotic Love, honored by the pagans with orgiastic rites which form the basis of the modernday February custom of VALENTINES DAY. Yet the story of St. Febronia, another historic icon of the year's second month, reads like something from the Marquis de Sade: a young girl in love with the handsome son of a nobleman declines to sacrifice her virginal purity, suffering incredible tortures and mutilations in order to die innocent and unscathed. Interesting contrast, yes? But therein lies the universal association of February with the erotic: no matter what your own particular preferences, there is something in the month's historic basis for you. Yes, friends, the month of erotic love is again upon us. Happy Valentines Day, or happy orgiastic rites, whichever. May Cupid put one of his love-tipped hunting arrows through your heart (and your chest and back in the bargain) this year! (See? Can't Valentines Day be dark, sinister and threatening?)

*** Besides love and orgiastic rites, February also brings us the GUNTERSVILLE GETAWAY, coming up the 25th through the 27th this year. Forecasts have the 2005 Getaway pretty much the same as always: at the lakeside cabins at Guntersville State Park; killer party with kegs Friday night, trips horizontal, vertical, and ridgewalking going out Saturday. We're kind of on our own for dinner Saturday evening, as the lodge is currently under renovation and neither of the dining rooms - in fact, none of the guest accommodations nor anything else in the lodge - is operating. Saturday

night is the annual Grotto auction - everyone is urged to both donate goods and come to bid on them (well, not on your own stuff). The Getaway is a not-to-be-missed event, folks. See you there!

*** A blast from the past! Last month DANGER JUDY, VALERIE, SHAY and I ran into STAN SHAW, Grotto member back in the late 60s and early 70s. Sure was good to reminisce about the proverbial good ol' days of that era. (Yes, Stan and I *do* remember them!) Stan recalled LAWRENCE BREELAND's mapping of ANDERSON CAVE, also JAY CLARK and the Spiders, and Jay's offer of \$100 to anyone who could show him a 100' pit in Jefferson County. (That offer still good, Jay?) He remembered several names from today's Grotto - MILO's came up in particular - and was most interested to hear the high points of Grotto activities in the intervening years. Good to see you, Stan! Always nice to run into an old friend. Hope to see you at Grotto meeting sometime soon!

*** As we progress deeper into 2005 this year's SERA SUMMER CAVE CARNIVAL hosted by "us" this May draws ever nearer. As of this writing, the submission deadline for the SERA GUIDEBOOK is less than 60 days away - mark MARCH 7 on your calendar if you have any notion of submitting material for the Guidebook, as that's when we must have everything in hand. (The ad deadline is slightly later, March 15.) As of this writing we have no submissions, zero, zilch, nichts, nada. Consider sending us something, we're looking for just about anything: TAG cave maps and/or descriptions, photographs, articles, accounts of memorable trips to

TAG caves, fiction, poetry... use your imagination. Help us out here, folks, the Guidebook, like this year's SERA itself, should be a Grotto effort. Oh, and don't forget to PREREGISTER for SERA as early as possible - in fact, how about right now, while you're thinking about it? Where is that checkbook?

*** Speaking of long range scheduling, notice that this year's NSS CONVENTION, to be held right here in sweet home Alabama hosted by our colleagues in the Huntsville Grotto, is scheduled for July 4-8, the weekend when our own Grotto's annual SINKING COVE CAMPOUT is normally held. Not to worry, your Grotto leadership is on top of the situation. The July Grotto meeting is scheduled for June 30 to allow for this, and the SC Campout might be rescheduled for sometime in August - this is to be decided at the February Grotto meeting - so that any of our number wishing to attend both events, and I know several who do, can do so with at least a measure of alacrity. Watch this space for further scheduling info about the Campout, and be there if you at all can, this is another not-to-be-missed annual Grotto event. (And the Convention doesn't sound half bad, either.)

*** I hear that framing is advanced on the Castle Mills under construction by MARTHA and GLEN near Sewanee, Tennessee, with gangs of slaves chanting in exotic foreign tongues as they raise by sheer muscle power the massive beams for the roof structure of the Great Hall and the titanic blocks of hand-hewn masonry for the - ahem. Perhaps not. Happy to hear your new domicile is coming along, y'all.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

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Forwarding & Address Correction Requested